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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 012549

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SUBJECT: A/S FRIED'S NOVEMBER 15 MEETING WITH DFM TITOV ON  
KOSOVO

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel A. Russell. Reasons: 1.  
4(B/D).

11. (C) Summary: In a November 15 meeting with DFM Titov, A/S Fried made clear that the U.S. intended to move forward on Kosovo quickly after UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari presented the sides with his proposal after the Serbian parliamentary elections. He stressed that putting off the status decision would gain the Contact Group (CG) nothing in Serbia and would risk losing the credibility the CG had in Kosovo. Fried stressed that, unlike Russia, the U.S. had troops on the ground and would not further delay a final status settlement and thus see U.S. and other NATO forces turn from liberators to increasingly unwelcome occupiers. He reiterated that a Kosovo with internationally-supervised independence was the best alternative available and that waiting for a solution agreeable to Belgrade, as Russia wanted, risked creating a chaotic situation for which KFOR, not Russia, would be responsible. All the positive features of the agreement, such as minority rights protection by the international community, would be lost with no corresponding gains.

12. (C) Summary, con't.: Titov was equally direct in stating repeatedly that Russia would not support any decision that did not have the agreement of both sides. He said he understood our analysis of the risks posed by delay, but argued that Ahtisaari had not fulfilled his role as a mediator and needed to present a package that Belgrade could accept. Titov was candid in acknowledging that the process was now reaching "a decisive point" and that it was likely that Belgrade would reject the Ahtisaari package soon after the elections and that the process would quickly move to the UN Security Council. In discussing action in the Security Council, Titov said Russia was willing to support a continuing international presence in Kosovo, including KFOR and an international civilian presence, but was not ready to "bless" a status decision that included independence. He raised familiar arguments about Kosovo's precedential value and concerns about a Greater Albania. End Summary.

13. (C) Assistant Secretary Fried met with Deputy Foreign Minister Titov on November 15 for one hour and fifteen minutes while Fried was in Moscow for the G-8 Political Director's Meeting (septel). Titov was accompanied by Russian Kosovo Envoy Botsan-Kharchenko.

A/S FRIED: MOVING FORWARD ON STATUS

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14. (C) A/S Fried told Titov that he wanted to explain the U.S. approach to Kosovo in the clearest possible terms because the U.S. intended to move forward quickly after UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari presented the sides with his proposal after the January 2007 Serbian elections. The Ahtisaari package provided for decentralization, minority rights and protection of the Serbs' cultural and religious heritage as well as international safeguards to restrain majority rule. The only possible outcome we saw was internationally-supervised independence for Kosovo. Fried stressed that putting off this decision would gain the Contact Group (CG) nothing from Serbia and would risk losing the credibility the CG had in Kosovo. The U.S. had troops on the ground and would not accept a permanent stall in the status process while we waited for Belgrade's agreement, which would never come. Waiting for a solution agreeable to Belgrade risked creating a chaotic and violent situation with no attendant benefits. In that case, all the positive features of the agreement -- particularly minority rights protection by the international community -- could be lost with no corresponding gains. The U.S. and NATO had troops on the ground; Russia, by its own choice, did not. The U.S. was serious about resolving the Kosovo problem, more than seven years after the campaign against Milosevic's forces there, and would not be deterred.

15. (C) A/S Fried underlined that the U.S. and Russia had come a long way together on the issue of Kosovo and that Washington and Moscow needed to bring a satisfactory end to the situation together. We need to "pull this tooth" so Serbia can get on with its European future. In order to make this happen without creating a difficult situation that

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threatened what the CG had accomplished, Russia's support was needed. The U.S. had not gone public yet with its support for Kosovo's supervised independence, Fried noted, but at some point we would.

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DFM TITOV: NO GOR SUPPORT WITHOUT SERBIAN AGREEMENT  
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16. (C) DFM Titov responded by stressing several times that Russia would not support any status decision that did not have the blessing of both sides. Titov criticized Ahtisaari for not fulfilling his role as mediator, arguing that he needed to go back to both sides with a revised proposal that would provide a basis for new negotiations. While the Serbians would not agree to independence, they could accept "an absolute degree of autonomy" or some other suitable designation for Kosovo that would prevent Serbian control over Kosovo's government, while preserving Serbia's territorial integrity (perhaps through allowing Serbian border guards). Titov argued that Kosovo should not in this case be permitted membership in international organizations. Fried pushed back that this was not realistic; Serbia would never agree to independence, no matter what offer was made, and the U.S. would not accept an unworkable status quo or impractical autonomy arrangements.

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THE END GAME  
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17. (C) While reiterating well-known Russian views on status, Titov also acknowledged that the process was reaching "a decisive point." He forecast that Ahtisaari would present the package to the sides in January or perhaps early February and the Serbs would respond negatively. The issue would quickly move to the Security Council, he predicted, but it was possible that the Kosovars at that point could unilaterally declare independence and would be recognized by various states, with or without a Security Council vote. Titov accused the Kosovars of "blackmailing" the international community by threatening violence if they did

not receive independence, even if they were clearly not ready for it.

¶8. (C) Turning to Russia's position in the Security Council, he said that it would be "easy" for Moscow to approve KFOR and the international community's continued presence in Kosovo, even though Russia had been disappointed with UNMIK's performance. However, Russia in the Security Council could not "bless" any status decision that led to Kosovo's independence.

¶9. (C) A/S Fried pointed out that the Serbian position was not coherent -- Belgrade understood it had lost Kosovo (witness Serbs in Kosovo being allowed to vote on the Constitution, while others were not) -- but was unable to publicly admit this. Serbia did not want to rule in Kosovo, but would not let the Kosovars rule themselves. Economic development in Kosovo was a necessity, but Kosovo could not become an IFI member without international status. While the present situation did not present ideal circumstances for Kosovar independence, this was still the best alternative available. Arguments for delaying a settlement risked creating gridlock in the international community, uncertainty about KFOR's status, and bloodshed in Kosovo.

¶10. (C) Titov said that Russia was also concerned about instability -- if a "quick" decision was reached, Moscow wouldn't exclude the possibility of an uprising among the Serb population in northern Kosovo. While Serbia was unlikely to use military force, unorganized violence was possible. Fried responded that KFOR was better prepared now than it had been in March 2004 and that it would act to protect all sides in the event of civil disturbances. In any event, chaos and bloodshed would be more likely in the event of a unilateral Kosovar declaration of independence, which Titov had himself admitted would be the likely outcome of continued stalemate.

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UNIVERSALITY AND FEAR OF A GREATER ALBANIA  
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¶11. (C) Arguing that the solution in Kosovo would create a precedent for other disputes, Titov argued that the situations in Kosovo, South Ossetia and Abkhazia had similar historical roots -- central authorities in the 1990's had tried to limit local autonomy and had produced a sharp reaction. Each of the separatists regions was following the situation in Kosovo attentively. Titov complained that Ahtisaari had promised a year ago to provide a paper justifying why Kosovo was a unique case but had failed to do so. Titov also raised the prospects for a greater Albania, arguing that the Kosovars were keeping quiet now, but would push the idea as soon as they achieved independence. This would lead to destabilization in the Balkans and was of concern to Kosovo's neighbors as well as Russia.

¶12. (C) A/S Fried reiterated that Kosovo would not form a precedent for resolving other disputes because of the unique character of the situation there. He underlined that the U.S. had made clear to Albania that its relations with the U.S. depended on Albania reining in irredentist tendencies. Tirana had not exhibited any. Fried acknowledged that any solution would put pressure on Kosovo's neighbors and that the CG needed to work closely with them to alleviate any negative fallout. He appealed for Russia not to block a solution that Moscow should recognize is the best that can be achieved. Choosing the imperfect was better than the chaos that would likely descend on Kosovo and the Balkans if the status process was not concluded expeditiously.

¶13. (C) This message has been cleared by A/S Fried.  
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